

RICHMOND POLICE DEPARTMENT



11-30 PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATING MANUAL

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Chief of Police or Designee

2/13/2009

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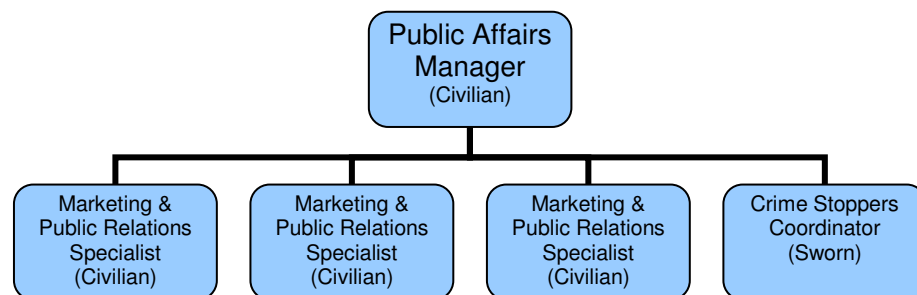
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MISSION

The Public Affairs Unit fosters communications between the Richmond Police Department, its employees, the community, and the media by providing accurate information about the Department and its community policing efforts.

UNIT STRUCTURE

The Public Affairs Unit is staffed by a civilian supervisor, three civilian marketing and public relations specialists and a sworn Crime Stoppers coordinator.



DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A member of Public Affairs is on call on a weekly basis to respond to critical incidents involving the Department, including homicides, traffic fatalities, and hostage/barricade situations. During the assigned on-call week that person drives a Department vehicle, covered under General Order 3-10, for which they are responsible. The on-call assignment is 8 a.m. Monday until 8 a.m. the following Monday.

- Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning investigations and operations
- Develop procedures for releasing information when Department members, along with other City agencies, are involved in a mutual effort.
- Develop message points for the Department on key topics
- Respond to media requests. Pitch story ideas to the media and arrange for interviews
- Provide instruction in the areas of media relations, marketing, leadership, public speaking and Freedom of Information to Department members
- Publish the weekly electronic newsletter, "Blue Line Times."
- Coordinate Crime Stoppers program, which includes promoting the program through local media outlets and responding to tips
- Oversee Department's Web site and update it on a regular basis with fresh content, photos and upcoming event information.
- Write talking points about each event for senior command staff that focus on audience's specific issues, as well as providing an overview of the Police Department.
- Prepare and distribute press releases and e-mail advisories.

- Develop marketing campaigns to promote various Department programs
- Coordinate and oversee special events, including the Police Memorial Service
- Provide the media and the community with daily newsworthies (significant activity within prior 24 hours) received from the Watch Commanders and a good news message of significant events within the Department.
- Handle customer service calls, which include requests for calls for service, crime statistics, police patches, fingerprinting information and generally routing callers to the correct person or unit.

TRAINING

Civilian members of the Public Affairs Unit must have a degree in English, journalism, mass communications, or public relations.

The sworn member of the Public Affairs Unit must maintain officer training and certification through the Richmond Police Training Academy.

The Public Affairs Unit provides training on media relations to the Training Academy for recruits and the Division of Emergency Communications for communications officers. Also, this training is provided to Command Staff, as requested.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS INQUIRIES

The Public Affairs Unit is guided by General Order 7-24. All requests for interviews should go through the Public Affairs Unit. This provides consistency in the messages and ensures the appropriate person is the spokesperson.

The Public Affairs Unit should receive incident reports on all homicides and aggravated assaults from detectives in the Major Crimes Division.

Identities should never be released until next-of-kin has been notified. If a family requests that IDs not be released, the Department will honor that request.

Reporters may obtain basic information about crimes from Offense Reports, which are public information.

Any further information about the circumstances of a homicide and what can and cannot be released must be cleared through the supervisors of Major Crimes.

The Public Affairs Unit may release the names of juvenile victims of crimes (except sexual offenses) as soon as next of kin are notified. Addresses (blocks only) and ages also are releasable.

The names of juveniles arrested for crimes **MAY NOT** be released per Virginia Code.

The following information on traffic accidents may be released –

- Date, time, location of the accident
- Names and addresses of drivers
- Names and addresses of injured persons
(although we seldom release this unless they are charged)
- Charges, if any, and the names of those charged.

Mug shots may be released upon request by the media. Before releasing the photo, check with a supervisor within Major Crimes or the appropriate Precinct detective supervisor to ensure that there is no problem with releasing it.

Release of suspect photos shall be upon the condition of the disclosure limitations as provided in the Freedom of Information Act section 2.1-342.2 (B)(2), which states that adult arrestee photographs shall be excluded from disclosure when necessary to avoid jeopardizing an investigation in felony cases until such time as the release of the photograph will no longer jeopardize the investigation.

At SWAT situations, take the time to go to the live trucks, seeking out the reporters and videographers. Talk one-on-one about not revealing tactical positions. Also request that the media not show the vehicles that SWAT members drive. Monitor the media throughout the situation. If anyone gets too close, move the perimeter line further back. If the Command Post is set up, be sure to watch the news shows to ensure that the media is following the guidelines.

The Public Affairs Unit coordinates media access and control in the field by giving providing a staging area for the release of information. At this staging area, a Public Affairs representative releases updated information to the media outlets on scene. The media is updated from this staging area periodically or as the information becomes available for release to the public.

JOINT PRESS RELEASES/PRESS CONFERENCES

The Public Affairs Unit will arrange for and/or assist with press conferences relating to departmental affairs. Any time a state or federal agency is involved in an investigation, that agency takes the lead, unless the agency requests that Richmond Police do so.

PRESS PASSES

The Richmond Police Department no longer issues press passes to reporters. However, Richmond Police strongly suggests that all reporters and videographers who cover the Department have a photo ID from their respective news organizations and display it at all times while at crime scenes or incidents. This will ensure that Richmond area reporters are identified in the event of a large-scale incident covered by reporters from outside the Richmond area and is also a safety and security measure.

MEDIA INPUT

The Richmond Police Public Affairs Unit is an active member of the Central Virginia Emergency Services Media Council. The CVESMC meets periodically to review media response current events as well as coordinate interaction between media and law enforcement public affairs personnel. The CVESMC facilitates the participation of the media in reviewing and revising policies and procedures regarding the public information function.